

Panhandle Health District

8500 N. Atlas Road Hayden, Idaho 83835

www.phd1.idaho.gov

Help is Available for Breast Cancer Screening

By Cynthia Taggart
Panhandle Health District

Two years ago, Martha Banderob's routine checkup wasn't routine. Her mammogram showed problems. Her doctor found a lump the size of a golf ball in her breast.

She was scheduled for surgery to remove the lump and advised to visit the Panhandle Health District (PHD) first.

"I was shocked the health district could help me so much," the St. Maries woman says. "I probably would have lost everything I own without it."

At PHD, Banderob learned that her diagnosis combined with her small income qualified her for Women's Health Check, a breast and cervical cancer screening program. It's primarily for lower income women ages 50 to 64 without insurance coverage for those services.

"It's an excellent program," Banderob says. "Because I didn't make much, I got a Medicaid card and my medical care cost me nothing."

Between Women's Health Check and money from the Coeur d'Alene Affiliate of the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, PHD is able to screen about 1200 women in the five northern counties each year for breast and/or cervical cancer. The Komen funds are primarily for women and men younger than 50 with limited incomes and no medical insurance or only catastrophic health insurance.

Since 2001, PHD has received about \$70,000 every year from the Komen Coeur d'Alene Affiliate.

When breast exams reveal possible problems and further medical care is needed, PHD signs women up for the federally-funded Women's Health Check program. The program also extends financial help to eligible women ages 30-49 after screening indicates and a health professional confirms a suspicion of cancer.

In 2007, PHD's screening programs led to five cervical and nine breast cancer diagnoses. So far this year, the programs have led to 11 cancer diagnoses.

Getting the word out to women is a major hurdle for PHD. Between 30 and 40 women in Kootenai County each month are screened through either program. But participation falls off radically in Benewah County and the low numbers concern Gail Turley, senior registered nurse at PHD headquarters in Hayden.

"I don't know why they're so low," Turley says. "Breast cancer is often curable now, especially if it's caught early."

Banderob had surgery to remove her lump, then another surgery to remove lymph nodes that showed cancer. She had six weeks of chemotherapy and six weeks of radiation. Medicaid covered her medical expenses.

"I probably would've lost everything if I had to cover it," Banderob says. "Chemo is very expensive."

Women's Health Check funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention depends on demand.

"We reach our limit every year, but we could possibly get more if we need it," Turley says.

People with the following income levels are eligible for the Women's Health Check program and funding from the Komen Coeur d'Alene Affiliate.

- \$20,800 annual income for a single person

- \$28,000 annual income for a two-person family
- \$35,200 annual income for a three-person family
- \$42,400 annual income for a four-person family
- \$49,600 annual income for a five-person family
- \$56,800 annual income for a six-person family
- \$64,000 annual income for a seven-person family
- \$71,200 annual income for an eight-person family

PHD offices in each county offer breast cancer and cervical cancer screenings. For information, call:

- Kootenai County—415-5270
- Shoshone County—786-7474
- Benewah County—245-4556
- Bonner County—263-5159
- Boundary County—267-5558